

This comment is in response to the FCC’s recent vote on the “Restoring Internet Freedom” resolution (Docket 17-108). It is written on behalf of over one hundred young musicians and creatives who together represent both the future of American creative culture, as well as a diverse cross-section of America itself. We the undersigned believe that the proposal in question is a misguided and dangerous step away from the economic and societal principles which drive creation, consumption, and progress, threatening the future of American cultural and economic influence and well-being.

You, being a human being, surely have a favorite musical artist, yes? Of course you do — and I’m sure you have wonderful taste! But, despite our adoration of our favorite artists, we tend to forget that they often struggle for years to break through the various barriers on the road to success. In “the olden days,” this entailed trudging across the country, playing to empty bars night after night, year after year, until you were lucky enough to meet that one golden connection (i.e., a record label executive, most likely smoking a cigar) who would unleash your talent on the unsuspecting masses. Thus, your favorite star was born!

The open Internet changed this. As with any great technology, the playing field was leveled — for both artists and consumers. If we view music like any other product (it’s not of course — it’s *special*, after all!), the openness and equality provided by the new digital paradigm meant that even the smallest independent artists could build a demographically and geographically variegated fanbase from their own laptop. Additionally, the accessibility afforded to all consumers has allowed potential fans to pick and choose for themselves based upon their own individual taste. All artists are presented the same to a potential consumer, so the ones with the best “product” find success the most often. And despite the pitfalls brought about by illegal downloading and sharing, the industry as a whole has adjusted, resulting in its first year of double-digit growth in nearly two decades. If that’s not free market in a nutshell, I don’t know what is!

The “Restoring Internet Freedom” proposal threatens this level playing field. Smaller artists — those who find themselves without access to the resources available to larger artists represented by companies and conglomerates with more swinging power — will see their powers of distribution and marketing diminished greatly. Those smaller websites and services which provide *affordable* methods of putting music on digital stores will likely not have as much clout with service providers as compared to the larger companies, resulting in a potentially dangerous situation in which their deservedly equal share of internet traffic is diminished greatly. This decrease in bottom-up competitiveness will have a profound effect on the landscape of the industry. Should not talent — the quality of product — be the bar by which we measure viability and success?

You can see the parallels between this and other markets. But the crux of the matter is this: the commissioners seem to believe that deregulation in favor of service providers is the route by which that precious free market can continue to thrive. But we must consider that with regards to the Internet, the ISPs are not companies providing an end product. On the contrary, they are merely the *highway* by which the consumer navigates to their final destination; the government does not tax us more heavily when taking a road to Whole Foods rather than Kroger.

The value of an open Internet to American culture, and by extension, its influence abroad, cannot be overstated. The smallest content providers, borne of bedroom studios, can place their art side-by-side with the most well-established artists of the day. Here, the consumer (i.e., the fans) is at a benefit as well, having a litany of artists to choose from. This overall increase in competitiveness and choice has resulted in the beautiful and expansive creative culture the United States claims as its own pride and joy.

But in a world where smaller artists have less access to resources than those who are already powerful, or where smaller firms struggle to compete with the relationships already extant between larger firms and service providers, everyone loses. American industry and culture loses its incentive for innovation, weakening our influence and culture as a whole.

It has been said that music is the closest thing mankind has to a universal language. Art transcends the barriers of language, geography, and religion. In its own universality, the open Internet has brought those disparate groups closer than ever before. Furthermore, a society which values the arts also values itself. If we choose now to apply even more road blocks to those who have found a way to create in spite of the barriers to entry, what are we saying about ourselves? We cannot afford to assume that our mistreatment of these gifts — music, art, and equal access to information — will result in anything but a dissolution of American influence and efficacy, be it here at home or abroad. The passage of this proposal would run directly counter to the founding ideals of the Internet itself, our economy, and our nation.

Thank you for your time.

POSTED JUNE 7th, 2017
ON BEHALF OF THE NAMES LISTED BELOW

COMMENT *on 17-108*
“Restoring Internet Freedom”

Submitted by
Logan C. Rifenberg

SIGNED,

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